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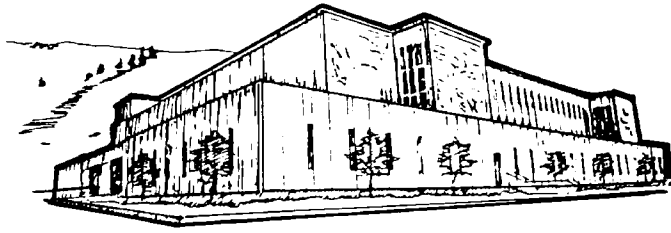
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OUT FROM HEAVEN

a novel

by

Terry Wean

B. A. Fairhaven College, 1980

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

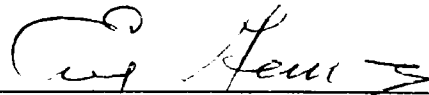
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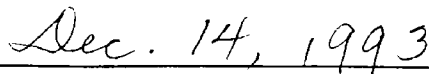
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So he drove out the man; and he
placed at the east of the garden of
Eden Cher-u-bims, and a flaming
sword which turned every way, to
Keep the way of the tree of life.

Genesis 3: 24:

One

Tim Seals stood in the sloppy, cold, grey morning, rain tedium drumming down steady on puddles slicked with petroleum. Seals rubbed his sore wrist, hesitating in the parking lot, contemplating the gate to the Ampco refinery. The low clouds hung up in the trees, stuck on the scrubber towers. The dull roar of the machine shuddered inside the downpour. Seals wanted to turn back, get in his car and go home, sleep away Sunday morning far from the whining deep rush of the giant petrol still. He tried to prod himself with visions of "the long white cloud", New Zealand. Aotearoa. A skyfull of snowclad mountains, rain forest, mud volcanoes, and geysers fished from the sea by the hero Maui.

Three more weeks and he would be there, standing where Abel Tasman stood, in the land of the Maori. If, big if, he could stick with this shitty job. Rain dripped off the brim of his Yankees cap fat plopping counter to the pulse of the machine rising up through his feet. Maybe he already had enough money. He just wouldn't have so much when he got to Auckland. Maybe. Maybe he should run now. He knew he was running away, and this huge industrial engine was what he told himself drove him. There had once been a rain forest here too. Cedar trees as large as the redwoods from the coast to the mountains. Gone, all gone the way this country was going.

Ampco's refinery covers a hundred acres at Cherry Point, on the inland coast of Washington state just south of Blaine and the Canadian border. This low grey coastal land is the seat of creation. Here Raven forms the world, sets the sun in the sky, and creates man and woman on the rocky beach of a bottle green island. Here, cloud and fog cleave to lush green rain forest, and the bright green earth is lulled by the lapping jade grey waters in Puget Sound.

Above it all, above the cloud's shroud, mountains fling white shafts, peak into blue beyond everything. To the east, an indolent sun rises on the great shoulder of Mt. Baker, Komo Kulshan the white shining mountain, the "great white watcher". Before Cook and his lieutenant there is Komo Kulshan, Shuksan beside him, breathing mountains walking, talking. Lummi believe everything has life spirit, the earth, rocks, trees, ferns, birds and animals, even the hail that falls from the sky has a spirit, a language, and a song of its own. These mountains then, get angry, make love, just like men and women. These great peaks stand under the control of spirits, nature spirits, just as the spirits that live in human bodies control human action.

Mountains are people, the peaks of the Cascade range move about at will, have wives, husbands, children. Mount Baker, Komo Kulshan, marries Clear Sky, Mount Rainier, and they have two daughters, two Twin Sisters. Lovers, Kulshan and Clear Sky fight, and Clear Sky moves away walking south,

where she stays, alone. To this day the Twin Sisters peaks stand beside Komo Kulshan, his daughters, stretching to see their mother Clear Sky's white summit where she guards Seattle. The dark stony girls are dwarfed beside Baker's great cone from which a small steam plume jets, caught in the same wind chant, a sign of the mountain's anger drifting across a rising sun.

To the west the Olympic Range, called after Greek Gods as if out of time, guards the shrouded coast, pinking above the soft grey counterpane that stretches beyond vision to Hawaii. To the north Victoria Peak on Vancouver Island, and the Coast Mountains of British Columbia, wrapped in borealic blue, crash two thousand feet from above opposite shores to tumble into Georgia Strait's stony waters, beneath the clouds.

Beneath the clouds rains pock the inland waterways of Puget Sound, soaking the San Jaun Islands, an archipelago named for Spanish explorers at awe in small ships. Lopez, San Jaun, Orcas, islands bound by grey channels gouged out by a miles thick ice age. Islands rocking on dark textured gulfs and bays soaked by the low sky in a clear cascade of water. Cascade. Water. Eighty Six inches of annual rain fall. Cascades, liquid rush and hush, water pouring down every little ravine. Fifty miles from rain drop to trickle, to rivulet, brook, stream, river, Puget Sound and the ocean. Water returning as rain with the North Pacific Current. The

dark tropical waters of Kuroshio "The Black Current" lapping warm on the coast of America, her clouds rung dry by the jutting mountains.

Rain. June rains in a June so green the very air is verdant. Green air lifting green leaf revealing green in a riot of blackberry, thimbleberry, salmonberry, blueberry, Indian plum, huckleberry, fern, foxglove, devilsclub, nettles, vine maple, cascara, yew, red alder, madrona, fir, spruce, hemlock and cedar flowing over the terrain in slow rolling waves to rich rocky shores. Rain the giver of life, the blood of the planet, maker of jungle and forest, keeper of the secret of simplicity, bringer of abundance.

This Rain dripped off the beak of Seals's cap, as a steady stream of working men and women pushed by him into the project. But Seals was stopped, outside the gate, fixed by a growing apprehension. His life had come to this, to working for wages, and he didn't know how, or why. Eight years before he'd graduated from Western with high hopes. What he had found was odd jobs, unemployment, and Kedra. They'd been living together for about seven years, off and on. Lived together and apart. And maybe she was what he wanted to run from. Maybe.

He'd met her in Pete's one night. He was picking up a few extra bucks as engineer for a band called "The Thread of Life". The band was on break, getting pretty loaded in the back when she walked in, and it was all over for him. She

was tall, willowy and dark. Almost six foot with long black hair to her butt. She moved like seven swallows bending reeds beside dark waters, and he was smitten by the natural beauty of her form. To this day he could not watch her move without being stricken by the beauty of life, the beauty of love.

Love took a bit longer for her. She had taken Seals's phone number but wouldn't give him hers. Surprise. She actually called him! And one sunny day she took him out to Lummi Island for the day. Enchanted by the smell and the sound of the sea, she'd decided she liked him. Watching the sun set she had kissed him, little rock crabs scurrying beneath their feet.

She slept with him that night, banging the walls of her small blue house on the south side of Bellingham. In the morning he had met Maxine and Mattie, her daughters, and fallen in love again. To him that was the real reason for Kedra and he to be together. Two beautiful girls, and it didn't take a lot of flash or style to give them what they needed to live. All it took was love, and hard work.

Seals was not strictly opposed to hard work, what bothered him was the idea that a good man must break his back. That the only value a man had came from the money he made, and that life could be bought. Kedra's mother had already turned her granddaughters into a couple of shoppers with her trips to Nordstroms, The Bon, Alderwood mall. Of

course he had it too, he liked to spend. Seals was as American as the next guy. Still, he thought Kedra's mother, Betty, was one of the coldest creatures he had ever met. She had married rich after divorcing Kedra's father, and money replaced the necessities of love.

"Sensitive to what needs," Betty had shot at him one day when he was demanding that she do more than teach the girls to shop. "You grow up, you go to work, and you make something out of yourself, or not." Betty didn't care too much for Seals. She called him a bad poet with bad teeth, and when she thought he couldn't hear told Kedra, "He's an able bodied man who is not carrying his weight". The feeling was mutual. Her remark stuck in his craw.

And this was what he and Kedra fought about, money and sex. Kedra was lucky to have only two children. She was sloppy with her body, and liked to say she had needs. Seals loved her beautiful hips, and the feel of her roundness, yet her lack of control, and a focus on baser needs frightened him. He did not know what she needed as she drove herself upon him, tried to draw him into some part of her that scared the shit out of him.

And Money, well, Seals could not be good, so he tried to be free. To simply live. Live simply. Despite whatever images of prosperity America nurtured, it was still a hard journey making a go of it. And any more kids would have killed Kedra. He was sure of that. He was also certain that

the girls came closest to fulfilling her deepest desire. She and her ex-husband, a painter, had named them Mattie and Maxine, actually Matise Marie Sheridan, and Maxine (for Max Ernst) Clair Sheridan. And there they were. Small miracles afoot in paradise.

Seals's knew his life was not exactly fodder for the New York Times, but he and Kedra could have a good life. She had the little house at the end of Donovan with a view of Bellingham Bay, two beautiful girls. With money he'd earned Reef Netting off Lummi Island, he'd helped her buy a new car. Well it wasn't new, and if it was a bit more modest, more practical than the rigs in the TV adds, it was a good car. He still didn't knew how she made the modest payment. The truth was, he felt she felt it was not good enough. She just drove it. She never checked the oil, or washed it. She did not even try to be content.

Seals knew that was the hardest thing, and the real truth was that, despite a certain denial and resistance to consumerism, he'd have liked to have more money and things. He knew it sometimes ate Kedra up that they hadn't gotten farther ahead in the last few years, and he guessed it ate on him that they were not so different from anybody else in America, though he'd have liked to think they were.

Seals shivered wet, cold. Today something was moving beyond all that. He had a bad feeling that entering the gate to the refinery was a mistake. And what could force him?

Well? Only money. But today he had a bad feeling. A good day to stay home. Call in sick. Quit. Shit.

Seals was only just beginning to trust his intuition about this morning. Might save his life. Maybe it was just the thought of a day in the furnace. Getting to him. He breathed, trying to feel silica in his lungs. What the fuck good would it do to die in some shithole like this? He should go home. Pack for the trip, and go.

Seals knew he would not go home. The best he could hope for was the end of the job. He stood in the coastal rain getting wet. Above his head a giant flame burned off excess gasses in great leaping bursts of energy. All sound was drowned by the roar of the giant machine. The whole setup was about a hundred acres, and the only natural sign in the fenced compound was a small alder forest in one corner. A herd of deer lived there, and the company used that in touting environmental awareness.

The five acre wood was dwarfed by the huge pastel storage tanks where the crude was pumped in, and the gasoline pumped out. Stairways delicately sea shelled around the outside of each peach and mint green tank. Closer, six scrubbing towers, with their furnaces, twinkled, lights still on. A great cloud of steam rose from a giant cooling unit and dissipated, instantly mingling grey on grey with low clouds. Each process was connected by miles and miles of pipes. The pipes ran in bundles along the ground, through the air, up

and around, down and away. Every where you looked there was piping.

The Cherry Point refinery also boasted two calciners, and the two acre metal building that housed the one in operation loomed like some stadium for metallic industrial games. Images of four thousand degree heat mingled in a hellish way with Seals's thoughts, and swept round the landscape burning everything, stripping the moldy land dry. The white heat inferno of a calciner terrified and fascinated, and this new calciner would be bigger, more productive, the largest coke calciner in the world. Housed in ten acres of metal the furnace would fire twice the coke, up production, increase profits. Seals worked in the new furnace as a brickie, a bricklayer. The brickies job was to line the inside of the metal furnace with refractory material so the shell would not burn out.

The coke came from the scrubbers, where the crude oil was scrubbed clean. What was left, the residue, was piped to the calciners where it was cooked at four thousand degrees. After the coke was cooked it was shipped three miles to the Intalco Aluminum Plant where it was used to make baked anodes and cathodes for the smelting process. The smelted aluminum subsequently arrived a hundred miles away at Boeing in the form of large glaring ingots.

Despite the scent of salt water that drifted in off Birch Bay on a slight breeze, everything that stood before Seals

now, was alien to his nature, mechanical. The main problem was just too dam many people. The coast was literally crawling with them, building, driving, shaping the future of the world.

When Raven shapes the world from the void, there are no people, no light, only gods and darkness. So Raven steals light from a great Shaman who keeps it in a covered basket. Raven tricks the Shaman by happily impregnating his daughter, then pretending to be the child. Biding his time, as a baby, Raven is finally left alone in the lodge. Raven takes the lid off the basket, grasps the light in his beak, and flies off home.

On the way he sees a giant clam shell on the beach. Raven can never leave things alone. He is always poking at the world, turning things over, shaping. So, dropping the sun in the sky, he flies down and opens the great shell. All these little men come crawling out. They run around the beach, crazy, erratic, mindless and Raven thinks to create woman to calm them. He picks up chiton shells and throws them at the men's loins, where they attach themselves. These little men scurry about the beach with chitons clamped on their sex. Then the chitons fall off and the men run away. No one ever knew what happened to those men. But the chitons grew and grew until they were very large. Then they broke open, the first men and women were born from these chitons in the first light of the sun.

Raven is very glad to have created woman, and like other gods he likes to shape shift into different forms and enjoy women's love. These affairs never do Raven much good, more often they cause him trouble, but he doesn't mind. That girl she's round like this and round like that and Raven wants her. Raven marries the daughter of the fog, and sets the beautiful woman with long teats-that-float-on-the-water at the head of the streams to entice the Salmon up. Raven names the birds, causes the tides to flow, brings fire to the people, and creates the living giving rain.

Of all this the whites who shaped the land now, knew nothing. Nor did they care. And Seals's mind was moved swiftly to another land. A place of different myth and climate, an Island Empire, nuclear free New Zealand, Social Democracy, fern trees, Fiordland, where the rain was warm, as warm as the people, as warm as the sun. Seals stepped back, turning away.

"Hey man it won't bite ya." Polly's loud voice boomboxed as he slapped Seals on the shoulder. Startled, Seals jumped. Polly's big face leered at him. Seals cringed. Polly easy in his phisicality was over six feet, heavily freckled with kinky red hair, a powerful upper body and long muscled limbs.

"Just think of her as a big old whore, and bang away at her." Polly grinned and grasped the air in front of him,

moving his hips suggestively. "Day after day. A big slow fuck." He spread his arms like a wild bird dancing.

TWO

The brickie's trailer sat in an avenue that ran between two huge metal buildings. Other trailers were rowed up along either side of the roadway. One for each trade. Pipefitters, carpenters, electricians. A few men stood in small groups outside in the rain, but most waited inside, smoking.

Inside Seals struggled to get his work boot through the resisting leg of his coveralls. The gagging fluxing job smell engulfed him. These men brought the job in every night and hung it on a nail. Every morning they came to the job trailer and put it back on. Seals's coveralls were heavy with grime, silica dust, and the taste of metal. The whole trailer was thick with the scent of these men, and this work. The air was taut with the smell of expectation, the scent of anticipation and just a whiff of dread.

There were three tables inside the forty foot single-wide trailer. Groups of grey men waited around each, sipping coffee, playing cards, reading the paper and talking. Each had his own reason for being in the crusted air of the job trailer, and each had his own morning ritual. Coffee, cigarettes, half a sandwich, or the newspaper. Little things that fortified, that brought humanity here. Each man too, had to make space in this hard room. And most were silent, unfriendly.

Lew Day sat quietly drinking his coffee. He had his own reasons for wishing the job was done. He was working away

from home. A lot of these guys were. They had come from all over the Northwestern states to work. The job was the most important thing, and the money. That's what kept them going. This job was three months old, and even though Lew knew a few of these men, there was not much beyond job talk, which was fine. Lew preferred to keep his own company.

Lew took a pinch of Copenhagen, a pinch between the cheek and gum, out of his mouth, tossed it, deftly setting a fresh chew with his thumb. His fucking hip ached. Getting old. Lately, a large part of him longed for the old days when he and Jimmie Littlefoot had run wild across most of the western half of the North American continent. Lew wiped his lips on his sleeve, his mind filled with home. Idaho, Genesee, the Palouse, a rich land without clothing, an Inland Empire without pretense. There the earths bare flank rippled, muscular across low buckskin hills to high dark mountains under the blare of and intensity of a naked sun.

When Lew thought of the earth he thought of old Spieden's homestead. Old Spieden's land there on Flat Creek was heaven on earth. A man could get so far back up in the hills there that it was just him and God. Lew knew every inch of that land, having ranged it with Jimmie by horse, and truck. Jimmie was Lew's best, only, friend. The Clearwater had once belonged to Jimmie's people, downriver people from Valley of winding waters, Nez Perce. The Palouse was Jimmie's birthright and held the graves of his people. Yet most of

that beautiful country, all those running rivers were denied to Jimmie and his father.

"Who was my father?" Lew's mind jumped, "Some asshole." Probably Lew's own son felt the same way about him. Lew was not much of a father. Still, he was the best he knew how. Wasn't he? He wondered what the boy was up to right now. Nothing, scuffing the South Dakota dirt. Certainly not in church. Lew tried to imagine Rapid City on a Sunday morning. South Dakota was not the Palouse. Again that rolling golden land warmed him, he loved it more than all the rest of the world. Despite any taint the land was Lew's own birthright too. Stolen lands. So what? What had come to Jimmie's grandfathers unclouded from their fathers, now came to Lew. The Palouse. Home where Coyote was creator, home of the East Country Boy. Wallowa, Clearwater country, home of the Walam-wat-kin and the beginning of the Lolo trail, where it never fucking rained like this.

The time he spent away from there seemed lost. Time. What was it, five, six years ago now? Libby had left and taken the boy Spieden. He was Lew's boy, named after Lew's grandfather, and nick-named Spider. Lew hadn't seen the Spider, in five years. And what was that, but an echo of Lew's own father, if there could be an echo from a voice Lew'd never heard. Lew couldn't blame his own parents for dying, and he didn't blame Libby for living. There was no blame in it. It just was. Whoever his pa had been he was

gone. Life was rough all over, and in her defense, Lew'd give Libby a pretty hard ride.

It was down in Las Cruces, New Mexico where she just left, took the boy and ran back to Canada. Lew'd lived with Jimmie Littlefoot for a while in a cheap mobile home park down on the Rio Grande. Jimmie was manufacturing Pueblo artifacts for a living. If you could call it living. After a particularly long drunk Lew had wandered back north, where, in the fertile Palouse east of Genesee in northern Idaho, he'd spent his childhood with his grandparents, his mom's folks. Spieden and Virginia Day owned a thousand acre homestead perched above the confluence of the Potlatch and Clearwater Rivers, in sight of the Bitterroot mountains.

Lew'd gotten back to his grandparent's farm to find the place going to hell, and taxes going up and up. Lewiston was growing, and all of Latah County was progressing. Fuck progressing. Nothing but more taxes and more taxes. Till the farmers couldn't make it. Old Spieden's horsing around barely got he and Virginia by. The old house needed paint, pens were coming apart, corrals tumbling, and the barn creaking. Spieden was just too old to keep it up. Seeing the farm that way kind of sobered Lew up. Spieden and Virginia had given him everything as boy. Raised him up, no complaints. He couldn't let them just slip away. So Lew settled down for a while, decided to help. That was why he had gone to work.

Lew took the first job he could find setting lead plate on the walls at Hanford. Then moved on to laying brick down at Satsop, where he'd bought his union card. And now he was here, in Washington laying refractory. The work took Lew away from the farm a lot, but the money was good and he sent most of it home. Lew had plenty of layoff time too, so he had time to paint the house, fix things up, working side by side with old Spieden whom he couldn't keep off the ladder, and sometimes Jimmie who'd dragged back up to Idaho, reluctant to return. This life wasn't all bad. Lew even did some competing on the local circuit, just roping calf.

Rodeoing never'd been much of a life, even when he was single. Still he loved it. Lew'd roped and rode all over the west. Got as far as the semi-finals at Calgary before old Devil Did It smashed him. Lew's body gave out and his career went out too. The hip still pained him, and he rubbed it automatically, thinking of the cold damp cold Canadian air that drifted down across the nearby border. Canada was where Libby'd gone, finally. Alberta. She was an Alberta girl. Lew'd met her in Saskatchewan. A little rodeo up there. She took first in barrel riding, and he finished in the money riding bulls, and wrestling steer.

Libby was the prettiest thing he'd ever seen then. Lew proceeded to marry her and drag her across half the continent. He got her pregnant too. The baby was the boy

they called Spider. Libby'd put up with a lot he guessed. Ten years of nothing. Rodeoing, and meaningless jobs working cattle, peas, wheat, corn, alfalfa, and in a sauerkraut factory in Franklin, Idaho.

Lew and old Spieden had followed up to Alberta to bring the boy back to the Palouse. The old man was seventy at the time. Lew'd been with the boy only for a few moments before he'd got into it with Libby's brothers. It was old Spieden drew a gun and saved Lew from a good stomping. They both got thrown out of Canada, and the boy was lost to them. Old Spieden cussed all the way home. He hadn't held much with marrying a foreign woman. He never trusted borders, and the possibility of having one between a man and a woman was worse than bad luck.

Later they heard Libby had remarried, and was living down in South Dakota. Married some cowboy, living in some trailer. It wasn't like people ever learned anything, or changed, and they started out plenty strange. Lew guessed if it didn't take all kinds then God had gone to a lot of trouble making a pack of weirdness for nothing.

The boy must be sixteen by now. Lew still sent him the odd letter, but not often and he didn't know if Spider ever got them. Twice the boy had called. Lew'd missed both calls, but the kid'd talked to the old man, and to Virginia.

Seals's steel toed boot was still stuck in his coverall leg, he stumbled sticking his hand out, and it found Lew's shoulder. Lew's bright blue eyes smiled up at him. "Seals."

"Hey Lew."

Seals regained his balance, and got his foot through. He held his breath to avoid the silica and pulled his coveralls up over his shoulders. The thick cloth hung heavy. Seals shrugged under the weight, and zipped them up.

"Hell of a way to spend Sunday," he said sitting down beside Lew.

"One day's as good as the next."

"Yeah."

Seals seemed small and thin next to Lew who was easy six foot tall. Lew's blonde hair and expansive features were darkly bright compared to Seals's sharp tight face and thin black hair. They were Mutt and Jeff, night and day, but Seals was drawn to Lew from the beginning. Something about Lew's straight forward approach to life on the job. Lew didn't equivocate, he made his mind up quickly simply, and he didn't bullllshit. And Lew was older, maybe thirty five to Seals twenty eight, and maybe wiser. Seals Pulled out a package of Drum, rolled a crooked cigarette, put on his glasses, and settled down to read the Sunday paper. The fag drooped careless from his lip. The package of Drum lay half open on the table beside a thermos and Seals poured a cup of

coffee. Lew turned his way and Seals smiled his crooked brown smile, pale eyes sparkling wetly huge behind glass. Lew caught a strong smell of tobacco and coffee that came on Seal's breath.

The trailer was thick with smoke. More bad air, Seals thought. This was where it happened. Here in the foul bowels of the beast. Eighteen seventy five an hour. This the temple of exchange. Men for dollars, dollars for men. A true ritual he'd avoided for so long, which now seemed to have run him to ground. As much as he liked to espouse some nobel cause, his reasons for being here were simple. Money. Most of these men were here for the same reason, working for something, a wife, a bad habit, because there was no other opportunity in the land of opportunity. And Seals was thinking he should run faster and farther than any of these assholes. But here he was. And he knew he would be as long as he could take it.

Lumpy, an indolent apprentice, sat across the table, and their eyes met briefly. Lumpy's large sweating body disgusted Seals, but it was more than Lumpy's weight. Seals knew Lumpy was lazy, and one of the ones who was here for a free ride, the epitome of the worst in American workers. A bucket rider, someone to carry. Poor Lew had to work with him every day. What a weight. Lumpy averted his greasy eyes, turning back to his section of the paper.

Lew spat and poured himself a cup of coffee. The warm cup felt good on his stiff and sore hands. He could still feel his hip too, and cursed the pain under his breath. The old body was wasn't what it used to be. Too much abuse. Beside him Seals began cleaning his respirator, but stopped. Seals delicately pinched the chewed fag butt between thumb and forefinger. He pointed excitedly at the newspaper.

"See the headline! 'Strike Out: A whole new ball game for labor'. No wonder we are working for eighty percent scale." Lew liked Seals, even though Seal's was somewhat of an exception among these rough men. Small and delicate, he was a puzzle to Lew, but he could talk, about things other than work or beer. And Lew, naturally curious, liked to listen. The worst was, Seals was somewhat a complainer, and had chosen Lew as his confidant, and comrade.

"Shut up Trotsky," someone yelled.

"I don't have to. It's right here in the free press of a free democratic country." Seals looked at Lew before going on. Lew drew back, a reflex. The job was beginning to wear on him, on everyone. Lew didn't need any trouble here, but he smiled, also a reflex, and Seal's, encouraged, went on.

"At no time in the last decade has the deck been so stacked for management against labor. Ever since president Reagan fired 10,000 striking air traffic controllers ..."

"Somebody shut him up."

Lumpy watched them both. He was reading the horoscope, and tried to figure their signs. Seals was a Sagittarius, maybe a Taurus. He was stubborn and aggressive, and liked to argue. Sagittarius, yes, "Don't dredge up the past!" Yes that seemed right. "Step forward into what could be a bright future. Love is no stranger, you'll know it for sure by 10:00 p.m. Professional superior says, you appeared at the right time!"

Seals spoke quietly to Lew. "I don't even know if they read the same dam paper. They just don't get it. They love Bush as much as Reagan, and both have sold them out. I'm glad I'm getting out." Lew knew Seals was working for plane fare to "Nuclear Free" New Zealand. "These idiots will sing a different tune when they are hungry," Seals whispered to himself.

Lew chuckled. These men were already hungry. Their presence here was a sign of hard times. Many of the local contractors in Whatcom county could be found working on this project. Like Joe Ingress, and his sons Randy and Pat. Then there was Tiesman, and Kenny, and even Old Tam Tucker the union rep had to run private contracts because the union couldn't keep its men busy. The construction business was always boom or bust, and things had been booming, until the war, and the recession began to drag on. The bust was a rough business for a lot of people all over the Northwest. Hell there was no work at all in Yakima, Spokane, Coeur d

Alene. In the trade this job, and other's like it were just the last straw on the tail end of a rank mare.

Many of the men on the project were working far from home out of locals as far away as Boise, Salt Lake City. All at eighty percent scale because that was the best deal the union could get. And refractory wasn't pretty work. This job hardly resembled bricklaying, a physically demanding trade in itself. Here in the stomach of the furnace the air was foul, the noise deafening, the work brutal and unrewarding.

Coolie, a small thin man with a blonde goatee and moustache, came in trailing rain behind him. Coolie was A. P. Green's man, a "white hat". The way it worked was Bechtel Corporation won the overall bid for construction of this giant coke calciner. They subcontracted the refractory work to A. P. Green. That's where Coolie came in, and though A. P. Green had an office trailer, it was mostly payroll and paperwork. Secretaries running the whole goddam operation, and Coolie. He answered to Hank Wendel, and surely somewhere, someone on the other end of a phone. As Seal's was fond of saying, "probably in Japan, or France".

Lumpy watched Lew over the top of the paper. A small muscle moved beneath Lew's weathered cheek. Lines around his blue eyes sketched a hard life. The eyes drew a dividing and indifferent sky beneath thick stalk straight blonde hair that was cut short in front, but hung down over the collar in back. Lumpy'd decided that Lew was a Cancer. The quiet

type. Lumpy read the silent horoscope, "Outline business boundaries, articulate aspirations. Emerge from recent emotional cocoon. Terms will be clearly defined - once you put your foot down. Discretion necessary."

Coolie looked around, a soft grey rustle of men and cloth, underlining his look. "Well boys, another day another dollar. Let's keep up the good work. This hummer's still running ahead of schedule. That makes a lot of people happy. Me included. Don't forget we are building the world's largest coke calciner. It ain't no piss pot, and you guys can be proud."

Coolie ran his grey eyes over the men for emphasis and the satisfied, said, "Ok. Lets roll."

"Adams?"

"Here."

"Anderson?"

"Here."

"Bass?"

"Baker?"

"Colins?"

"Day?"

"Yeah."

THREE

After roll call Lew decided to wait for the whistle in the cool morning air, away from the smoke and smell of the trailer. He stuffed two doughnuts in his pocket, closed his lunch pail, adjusted his hard hat and went out. Despite the cold rain, men began to straggle from other trailers, and mill aimlessly about checking their watches. The whistle blew, and instantly a steady stream of men, and a few women poured from the trailers. Pipefitters, electricians, carpenters, each of the trades flowing to work, becoming a river of grey humanity. Lew stepped in and was swept towards the new calciner.

Seals came up beside him. "Hi ho, hi ho," he sang.

Inside the vast metal building Lew clang banged up a steel stairway still following the ragged line of coveralls, shuffling boots, and hard hats. The dark air, inside the new calcine building, swirled thick with the smell of metal, flux and oil. The actual furnace, a cylinder about two hundred fifty feet across with a cone shaped bottom, was suspended above the concrete floor, in the center of the building. The rig was designed so that it fed like a hopper, huge trucks could pull under, load up, and drive away.

The building was windowless, dark. The only natural light came from an opaque, fiberglass paneled, clearstory at the peak of the roof. The rest was dimly lit by screened lights.

Specific job sites were lit directly by arc lamp. The brickies worked at the very core of the project, inside the suspended furnace. Seals, who climbed ahead, turned as they paused on a landing waiting, and smiled his crooked smile at Lew.

"Behold the fell beast. The banners of the King of Hell proceed toward us." Seals crooked brown teeth clashed behind thin lips. He coughed and then sent a logy hurtling into the abyss below as the line began to move again.

Raining spittle, Lew thought. "Thank God it's Sunday, Trotsky," he said to the back of Seals head, where his dark hair pinched out below his yellow Bechtel hard hat.

"We must go by such a ladder from the core of woe."

"Shut the fuck up Seals," somebody yelled.

Lew watched Seals's logi disappear into the darkness below, then climbed slowly to a catwalk that curved away from him in both directions forming a great circle around the giant coke furnace. Reaching the catwalk Lew broke to the right. As most of the men went left, Lew eased around the vast steel structure to the right, where Lumpy waited at the mouth of a four foot pipe. Lew's pipe. Seals tagged along eager to put off starting work, eager to keep Lew's company. This was not the sort of work a man survived alone. Seals was drawn on like a lonesome dog, and Lew tolerated him. Seems he was always picking up strays.

Lumpy pale, lard like in skin and expression, stood idle at the mouth of the four foot pipe, waiting.

"You ready for this shit Lump?"

Lumpy shrugged. Lew gathered his tools, and put a paper dust mask around his neck. Seals was looking down the pipe which was suspended high above the slab grey concrete below, and twisted up from the darkness a fat snake.

"I don't know how you take it in there all day."

"Hell I'm almost done, and nobody bothers me."

"True. Hey, Let's meet at break," Seal's said.

"Whatever." Lew hiked himself up into the mouth of the pipe. "Bricks and Firebond Lumpy. Keep em coming."

"You bet."

Lew lowered himself down, and struggled to turn in the confines of the pipe, slowly letting himself down, down. Planting his feet on yesterday's bricks Lew stopped and braced his back against the wall of the pipe. The air was already close, and the heat would build despite any weather. In this tight world everything was compressed. Lew's hip ached as he completed a small awkward movement. He rubbed the pain hitting the dangling bulb of light with his shoulder. The light fell banging, reverberating, clashing shadows on the new white brick below, and went out.

"I need a goddam light." Lew shouted in the darkness. His voice twisted and turned curling along the slick steel to invisible ears.

"What?" Seals was still above, putting off the inevitable.

"Light. I need Light."

"Ok. Right on it"

Seals immediately began hauling on the dark cord, bringing the dead light up. Turning he surprised the slack and empty gaze of Lumpy's pale eyes. "Lew needs a new bulb."

Lumpy drew his hands from his pockets and shrugged. "I don't have one."

"Well find Coolie and get one."

Lumpy turned and started to amble aimlessly off. "Wait. I'll go. You stay here." Lumpy stopped, slowly turning, to look at Seals, who had his head back in the pipe.

"I got to go find Coolie. Sit tight." Seals's voice dropped on beyond Lew where he hunkered in the darkness chewing on his bitter mood with teeth like silent oaths.

Up above Seals hurried around the catwalk glancing back over his shoulder to where Lumpy, the gone light dangling in his hand, lowered himself onto a bucket to wait. The mouth of the pipe loomed a serpent maw behind him.

"About to be devoured," Seals sang, "Unmindful the waiting innocent." The huge body of the beast twisted down and away disappearing into the metallic clamor and darkness of the ten acre building. A fire pipe. Lined with firebrick. Dragon's breath for the worlds largest Coke calciner. And a man sitting in cramped darkness waiting for light.

Seals was surprised to find Del Coolie and Bass in conversation outside the entry port to the furnace. Seals's appearance confused them momentarily. Lifting the sleeve of his coveralls Coolie glanced at his watch, and quickly passed a cloud across his sea grey eyes. His goat like blonde beard quivered up and down as he worked his tight lips. "Where have you been, Seals?"

"Looking for you. Lew needs a new light."

"O. Ok. I'll take care of it. You get in there and get to work."

Seal's eyed Bass suspiciously. What the hell was he doing sucking up to Coolie. The two had been huddled in a conspiratorial manner, and Seals was ever suspicious of management, and their ploys. Seals grinned, looking hard into Bass's dark face, trying to discern his motives. Bass's brown eyes darted back and forth uncomfortably, and his lips tightened behind his full dark beard and moustache.

"Come on now. Let's put some speed on." Coolie urged Seals to work.

Seals climbed through a four foot porthole and was swallowed by the furnace. Bass mouthed an unformed obscenity, sucking air.

Coolie laughed. "Better get to work there Bass boy. Don't want to be thought a slacker." Chuckling he turned, walking casually along the catwalk.

Bass's face was crimson. His eyes blinked behind his safety glasses. He did not smile.

Seals dropped down off the lip of the port and stood on the sloping floor of the cylindrical furnace. Three hundred feet across. What did that make it? Was it pi r squared. Transcendental numbers. Was that it? 3.141 blahblahblahadinfini- tussanctumamen. What was infinity but, men toiling. Here in the bowls of a metallic monster they moved to work. What did that make it? The circumference? 150 foot radius. Little shards of glass floated through the blinding glare of the arc lamps. Seals put on his respirator. The others laughed at his respirator. He didn't care. The warm plastic sucked to his face, hot. Did it keep him safe? An illusion, probably. Sucking bad air through false filters. Thank god for the illusion.

Seals walked over and set his tools down at his work station. The job was coming along. The entire furnace floor had been poured, in sections, with refractory cement. The floor looked like a great fallen pie. pi r squared. When the furnace was in operation the whole floor would rotate, and natural gas would pour through the ports firing to temperatures of four thousand degrees. A hell of a deal. Coke for the insatiable habit of the nearby aluminum smelter. Aluminum for the insatiable habit of military industrial Boeing, a tidy system. Bechtel was the worlds largest construction company, with the Ataturk Dam and other

great feats to its credit. The company was also responsible for such graduates as George Bush and George Shultz. What goes around comes around. Seals hoped those guys would get what they deserved. Cooked hydrocarbons. Cooked, coked, choked. Random drug tests too. Only for the permanent employees.

Seals and Pat Ingress would finish laying up the firebrick around the base of the wall soon. Then what? He heard Polly's voice raised in laughter and looked up to see him slap Bass on the back. Irrksome. Bass probably wanted to scream, though they were friends. Bass, Polly, and many of the men were already at work ramming. Ramming was a job Seals wanted to avoid.

Ram Plastique was a soft refractory material that came in two foot blocks, and was sliced off, with a spud, in slabs four inches thick. The slabs were slapped on the wall, and then rammed into place with a small pneumatic jack hammer. The ram gun was hand held, about the size of a telescope, and had a flat round tip. The plastique would turn soft, almost liquid under the ramming pressure of the gun, and, in two layers, flow together into a solid six inch thick fireproof coating. The remaining walls and the ceiling of the furnace, as well as a chimney the size of a house, had to be rammed.

Ramming was a horrible job. The noise of ten or fifteen ram guns was deafening. Everywhere there was noise, and

dust. A mans hands soon cramped and stiffened under the constant vibration of the gun. Seals felt lucky to be actually laying brick, but he and Pat would have the brick base done soon. Not more than two hours work left. Then what? No ramming please. Maybe he would quit. The mornings cloud clung to him, dark rushing in his veins.

Seals pulled his buttering trowel out of a five gallon plastic tool bucket which had usurped the mason's canvass bag, and the carpenter's tool box to become the tote of choice for modern workers. Seals opened a pail of "Firebond". He dipped into the dark brown goo, buttered a white firebrick and set it.

"Where the fuck is the light?"

Deep in the dark pipe Lew waited. He didn't really mind the absence of light, or the confines of the pipe. He had chosen this particular task. The pipe was as close to home as he could get. Solitude. It was easy money too. Stuffy though. He could taste the silicate brick dust in the dead air. A fan would be nice. His hip cramped. Should climb out and walk around. He would be stiff again tonight. "Where the fuck is that goddam light?" Lew spit, shifted his weight, and unzipped the top of his coveralls. Tying the sleeves around his waist he freed his torso. Fine white dust settled on his sweat damp arms invisible in the darkness.

A day went by fast in the pipe. All day Lew stood on the bricks he'd just laid, and then laid a new course around the pipe, shifting his feet so that he too slowly rotated around and around. Many of the bricks had to be trimmed to fit the cylinder of the pipe. They were soft firebrick, so the cutting was easy by hand. Refractory brick were light, like chalk, but still the constant grasping, setting and trowel work go to his hands. The main problem was the dust, but Lew didn't even mind the dust. The one thing he had learned about Union work was to stay out of the way. At least nobody bugged him in the pipe. Lew's main gripe was Lumpy sleeping up above. Sometimes Lew had to climb out and wake Lumpy up. One thing certain. There were lot worse jobs on this project.

"Where the hell is that light?" he whispered playing with the darkness, opening and closing his eyes. Open to the darkness. Nothing. Eyes straining to see three feet across the pipe. Closed. A desert night. Patterns of Mescal light whirling into an eternity. Libby's eyes, or Jimmie's hair flowing dark as they ran laughing, fleeing. Lew sought their faces, like searching for faces in the black steam of the sweat lodge. Lew could smell the rich dark smell of the bodies of the old men, and hear their voices rise with the steam, lifting him again. hitkoli-xno?qa ka ?ipiti-te cika-wis ka ?ipnim po-pciyawnox ?ineki-xtilu-ne ?ime-sne ka pa-?nahwa-ka?yktax. Up through the darkness, a rustling of

feathers, cr-r-rruck prruk tok tok. Lew followed a raven, his own dark eyes open to eternity. Cr-r-rruck tok tok prrukk.

"He had a vision."

"He didn't have no fucking vision."

Lew had opened his eyes to find Jimmie Littlefoot and Harold Kickingdog laughing down on him. They dragged him from the sweat lodge that day. Lew had been able to smell willows, and the sound of water trickled through bright sunlight.

"What happened?"

"You had a vision man," Harold said.

"Fuck that shit," Jimmie spat. "He fucking passed out."

Lew shook himself out of this old vision of Jimmie's laughing face. Jimmie and Lew had met in sixth grade, and been friends ever since. Not that it meant much except they would always share a bottle or a fight, and sometimes a woman. "Where the fuck is the light," Lew shouted up again. Only silence in answer. Helpless. Shit.

"Got my 4 x 4 stuck up to the door jambs in Spring Creek saturday. Spent the rest of the weekend getting the dam thing out." Pat Ingress worked beside Seals, and the two had settled into a slow steady work pace.

Pat Ingress, like his father Joe, and his brother Randy, did not wear even a dust mask. Pat was in a surprisingly talkative mood. He never said much, but Seals had always

liked him for his quiet cheerfulness. Pat didn't seem to have any qualms about his life. He was happy just to be able to work, and fourwheel.

Seals lifted his respirator so he could talk. "When do you go?"

"Two weeks. I go down to fort Lewis for Basic."

Pat was short like his father, with the same pug face. The only outstanding feature was a pair of sapphire blue eyes that sparkled constantly. Life. Blue life, eye life, off to war. A boy encouraged by his father to enlist.

"I woulda loved to hit that dam dessert. Some outrageous four wheeling I bet." Pat smiled.

Seals laughed, at him or with him. Maybe it didn't matter, but it did. Seals wanted to tell this simple kid to run run run for his life, but said nothing. At least Pat had missed the war. He would probably live through his tour of duty, unless Bush decided to go back in to Iraq. Seals knew Pat would eagerly volunteer to fight. Fitting his respirator on his face Seals breathed deep. Bad air good air. Pat stood there young and alive breathing shards of glass, prepared to die for ... for what? No one ever answered that question. Naked aggression by madmen to make the world safe for monarchy, new world order. New world order? We have the might and if you try to match us you will be squashed like a bug, like Noreaga, Kadhafi. We have the best equipment. We

have the best equipment surrender. The one with the best toys wins. War was a game but ...

... life was not so simple any more. At twenty eight Seals had been through his own troubled youth. He'd been too young for Vietnam, and now was too old for this latest madness. Seals liked to feel he was part of the solution. Freewheeling, and poor he owned no home, had no permanent job, no car. He borrowed Kedra's. He tried to live outside of the problem of over consumption that plagued the world.

Seals wanted to say something now that he had Pat talking, but all that came to mind was run, run, run as fast you can. He said nothing, besides with the respirator on Seals was impossible to understand. Pat's pale blue eyes smiled back at Seals's glance, and they again fell into a rhythm. Despite cumbersome clothing and awkward safety gear their motions were quick, fluid and precise. They buttered, placed and set the bricks swiftly working around the perimeter of the furnace, setting a footing for refractory plastique and the violence of ram guns.

To Seals, his respirator was a symbol. It made sense. If you were going to toil in the inferno at least you could wear protective breathing apparatus. Black Lung was no joke. All you had to do was to look at Joe Ingress, or old Tam Tucker the union rep. Shit. No way was he going to give his body to industry like that. Just a couple more pay checks and he was outta here.

Seals main concern was what to do with his library. His mind flared with pride as he thought of the neat rows of clean editions that lined his small apartment, and as he set the bricks he pretended they were his books. He set them in alphabetical order, the Russians mostly, the Acmiest Akmatova, The White Guard by Babel, and his favorite The Master and Marguerite by Bulgakov, Chekhov's The Seagull, Red Cats and Dogalypse, Dostoeyevsky The Idiot and The Brothers, Kirsanov, and Mandelstam "armed with the eyesight of wasps" translations by Greene and Merwin, Nadezhda's Hope Against Hope, Svetayeva, and the giants Tolstoy and Anna, Turgenev, Voznesensky, Yevtushenko. Seals ran his mind over the smooth alphabetical order of his books. Each was buttered, and cleanly set.

Something about the neat rows gave him intense pleasure. Often he would read a book, and then go out and buy a clean copy. He had hundreds of books no one had ever read, their spines had never been broken. There were classics too. The Odyssey, Dante's Inferno Purgatorio Paradiso, Joyce everything and Ellman's biography, Moby Dick. Most recently he'd read many books on the South Pacific, The Lure of Tahiti, Song for Satawal, Maughum's Trembling Leaf, London's Cruise of The Snark and Hawaiian Tales, Shoals of Time, The Bone People by Hulme, The Greenstone Door, The Goodwits Fly, and The Canoes Of Oceania. He could name each of the famous canoes that had brought the people to New Zealand, Aotea,

Arawa, Horouta, Mataatua, Tainui Takitimu, Tokomaru, and had studied Robinson's regional geography, rattling off a list of exotic plants from Manuka to the curious beech trees of the subantartic rain forest.

What he worried about was who he could ask to keep "The Seals Memorial Library" for him. Kedra, but, she didn't take care of anything. He certainly couldn't cart his books about tropical Islands. They would be destroyed. He needed someone who would respect them. He didn't even mind if they might read them.

Seals kept up a steady pace, and breathed small plastic coated rhythmic breaths. He could not believe he had condescended to work for these pigs. What the hell. Just do your work. Get it done, get the fuck out of here with some money in your pocket, and shut up about it. He shook his head. His thoughts melted into the swift pace that was contrapuntal to the million motes of silica that drifted into the arc light and passed like lazy hours.

FOUR

Lew wished he'd climbed out of the pipe right away. Now, he felt as soon as he did somebody would show up with a light and he'd have to climb right back in. This had not been a good morning. He could climb out if he wanted, and he could leave, quit. He'd of believed he was worried about Spieden, but Spieden was tough, and could take care of himself alright. What about Virginia. She'd been upset when she called last night. Worried about the old man, who'd been acting more like a young buck these days. She'd worried on the phone and he here, miles away sitting in the fucking dark. She was afraid Spieden might do something stupid and end up in traction, or with another heart attack.

Lew had reassured her, "He's tough. What about Jimmie? Maybe he could help out?"

"Hell, he's part of the problem. They go off riding like a couple of kids."

Lew had laughed, and she had sworn at him, but he wasn't worried, if anybody was doing anything stupid it was him. This fucking job was worse than county jail. Except he ate better, and went home at night. Lew had been in jail more than once. Spieden bailed him more than once. That time Lew and Jimmie drove over to Lewiston looking for whores. Jimmie's uncle's old Buick. Beater. Spieden had been there, waiting as Lew came out of jail into the light of day. It was Lew's first time for jail and sex. That woman had been

crazy. Laughing all the time. What was that song she sang? Getitupkeepitup? What? And Lew thinking he was so grown at fifteen. And he loved her. Did he love her? The way she had smelled honeysticky, and so soft. He didn't want any other man to have that.

And then Spieden in the truck saying, "Ain't no shame lovin a whore. Many a good man has. Problem is they ain't in it for love. It's love business, that's a different thing altogether. Many a good woman has followed that line of work. There's the Mary Magdalene from the bible. I ain't no great christian, but they say Jesus loved her, and I'm sure he did. At least he didn't hold nothing against her."

Spieden had looked over and smiled gently. Lew sat sullen, hunched against the door. "She sure did do a number on your face boy." Here Spieden chuckled.

Lew, hurt, shot him a poisoned glare. "Don't laugh at me."

"I don't mean to be insensitive to your predicament Lew, but you have to admit it ain't every young buck gets himself beat on by three working girls. Must have been a hell of a sight." Spieden chuckled again, and despite himself Lew couldn't help smiling.

"Ow. Don't you make me laugh."

"Why son, it's good for you."

The conversation succumbed to the rattletebangingrhythm of the truck. After a long silence Spieden, said "I knew a

cowboy married a whore once. I guess it worked out just fine. I know he wore a shit eating grin for three whole months before they drifted off down to Texas."

When Lew and Spieden got back to the ranch Virginia had tended to Lew's wounds without so much as a question, even though Lew had overheard Spieden tell her, "Got hisself beat up by some whore's over to Lewiston."

"It's that Jimmie Littlefoot," she said angry, knowing.

But that was not how it was. Jimmie had been passed out in the car. He woke up the next day and drove on home smiling.

Later that night Virginia had tucked Lew into bed. "Don't be in such a hurry. You've got plenty of life for living yet." She kissed him on the forehead and stood quiet above him for a long time. He could smell her sweet unadorned smell. Something of the kitchen and the horse stall. A plain smell of prairie grass and horse hair. Would she be hard underneath. No. He knew she was not. He had been drawn to her bosom often enough to know the soft warmth of her. He loved the rustle of her step as she moved across the room. In the crack of light from the door she paused, and her red hair shown like a halo around her darkened face. She turned, and her long red braid curled in the light, and then both were gone.

Lew shifted his weight, and adjusted his footing on the bricks. Now Spieden was old, fucking seventy six, and Virginia was pushing seventy, but he was still tough, agile. The old man got around good, even better since his heart operation at sixty eight. Hell he'd probably outlive Lew, and besides, if a man fell off a horse and died in God's own country he went straight to heaven. Spieden and Virginia had given him their life, his life. If Lew should be there, it was only because he wasn't riding out with Spieden himself. He should quit this goddam job and get on back to the Palouse, to god's country. Get on home.

Home.

Lew was startled by a noise above him. A light clattered down the pipe towards him, and Coolie's voice rang out.

"Ok Lew. Lets put some speed on. We're behind here now."

"Yo." Let them know I'm alive. Lew caught the light as it came in reach. "Ok." He rehung the light, pulled his trowel out of his pocket, pulled a brick out of the bucket that hung suspended beside him, and set to work.

Up above Coolie secured the excess cord from the light, and checked the rope to the brick bucket. "Keep up the good work," he said to Lumpy, and then walked away.

"Fuck you," Lew thought. He was this close to quitting. Now more than ever Lew wanted to be back on the farm, Spieden's farm, his farm. He wanted to be there to help Spieden. He wanted to be there with Virginia, and just to

wander so goddam far back up in the hills no one would ever find him. But, fuck he was five hundred miles away, layin brick in a goddam pipe.

Lumpy picked dry snot from his nostril, looked at it and then laid it careful on the metal railing. He looked down the pipe, then slowly lowered his weight onto an overturned bucket. He looped a rope, that disappeared into the pipe, around his foot, and breathed a sigh of contentment. All the excitement about the light was almost too much for him. He loved bucket time. It gave him time to think, and when he thought it was about the sky. The night sky. It would have surprised anyone watching him now to know that he could name the constellations, chart the movement of the stars, and perfect the grinding of a twelve inch lens and mirror. It even surprised him, though it was the only thing he had ever been interested in. Actually it was the only thing he had ever done. The rest of his life was spent in avoidance. But the stars, well he day dreamed of Cassiopia, Orion, Betelgeuse, The Bear, The Twins all turning on the steady Polaris. All close with the telescope he was building. It would carry him deep into Andromeda, and beyond. He dreamt too of space flight. Light speed, and warp speed, transporters, fasers, and life on the bridge of the Enterprise. Captain Kirk was growing old, The next generation Gordie LaForge, and Data, Captain Picard, Diana Troy and Dr. Crusher no more "Beam me up Scottie". All gone.

Time Space. Spacetime. Lost in timeblissfull thoughts Lumpy fell asleep. His corpulent imagination carrying him beyond, where no man has ever gone.

Deep in the pipe Lew thought he could hear Lumpy snoring. No. Not this early. Lew yanked on the rope holding the brick bucket, "Keep him awake for a while, anyway."

"Seals."

Coolie barked over the noise of the ram guns. A tall thin man with a large handlebar moustache, a great curving nose, and deep set eyes, dropped off the lip out the entry port and followed Coolie in, Bass too, and Little Davie.

"We're moving into a new phase. I want some of you boys up in the chimney now. You and Pat too. Joe and Tam can finish the footing. Get your tools and meet us on the catwalk."

Coolie paused letting his words sink in. "This here is Shaw Rose. A new man. I expect you all to show him the ropes. "

"Ok."

Coolie's voice droned on and men quickly gathered tools. Seals eyed the new man. New blood for the big push. More meat for the grinder. Seals had not considered that this furnace had a chimney. Each task was a single event, and the men were never given, nor cared for an over view of the project. Task after task that how things got done, but there was the throat of the chimney, right in the middle. A thirty

foot square hole closed off with plywood braced up with steel I beams. Innocuous, a patch in the ceiling. Going up. Hot air rises, cold air settles. Gasses hot gasses like a sun. Engineered. Should work. Fire it up boys. Seals climbed out of the furnace, away from the ramming noise.

Out on the catwalk Seals was joined by nine men, the new man Rose, Bass, Pat, Polly, Walter a big kid from Ellensberg who hoped to be a highway patrolman, Little Davie a wiry little brickie from Olympia, Corky a wizened old timer from nearby Ferndale, Jack, and Coolie.

Coolie led the way around the of the calcine furnace, and stopped at Lew's pipe. Lumpy slowly jumped up.

"How's it going Lumpy?" Collie nodded, then stuck his head into the pipe, coming almost face to face with Lew who stood just below the lip. "Lew. Finish up this pipe by lunch then join these men in the chimney."

Lew spit. "Sure thing."

"Lumpy, when you get done here come round and find me. I've got a job for you in the furnace."

"Ok."

"A special bucket for the fat boy," little Davie whispered loud enough to be heard.

Collie looked around hard, then lead the men up a stairway, and through an opening in the metal wall of the chimney. Once inside the men stood in a forty foot steel shaft that ran parallel to the ground, at one end it was

haphazardly closed off from the elements by plywood, and large blue tarps. At the other, the shaft made a right angle down to the center of the furnace below. A rather shaky looking scaffolding rose up out of this hole to the ceiling on that end.

"One hell of a chimney," Rose said.

"Yes," said Coolie with obvious pride. "Now Bass here knows what to do, and I'm going to leave him in charge, but just to get you started let me show you what we expect."

He moved down to the scaffolding. The men followed. Seals looked over a safety railing down into the shaft. Arc lamps illuminated it with harsh metallic light. Glare and flare in a shaft of burning light. Unreal. The shaft was about forty feet deep with scaffold in the center so that a man could walk around and be in contact with the outer walls.

"Another diabolical industrial torture pit."

Pat was at Seals's shoulder. "Looks like fun eh?"

"Some of you may not be familiar with the materials, so pay attention." Coolie pulled a two by three sheet of white fiber board out of a cardboard box. "This is silicate sheeting. We have two kinds. Loose bond, and tight. You can see how loosely woven these fibers are." He passed the board around. This is the tight bond. It is smooth and hard. Both are easy to cut with your keyhole saw. The loose bond goes on first. You will have to notch it over the rivets, so it sits flush with the wall. Also, to minimize emissions into

the environment this chimney acts as an after burner, so there are many gas ports, and inspection ports. They are clearly marked. You will have to notch around them. Use the FireBond to adhere the sheets to the wall. Just butter the edges, and make sure you get some in the middle. Any questions? Good? Ok men, let's get to work. If you have a problem, take it up with Bass."

As soon a Coolie was out of ear shot Little Davie said, "Hey Bass's bucking for a white hat."

Everyone laughed jeeringly, and Polly bent over spreading his cheeks. "O fuck me, fuck me I'm a company whore."

Engineers, and management always wore white hard hats to distinguish them from the workers. This separation was a point of contention and the white hats were the butt of the workers anger and frustration.

Jack snatched Bass's hard hat from his head. "It ain't white yet, but it's still full of shit."

The men howled with laughter, and Bass angrily grabbed his helmet back.

"Look I didn't ask for this, but I intend to do a good job. Now let's get to work." Bass looked around defiantly.

"Jesus, they sucked another one," Davie whispered. Seducing workers with a little power was a common management ploy. The illusion of power always worked. You pick the right worker, let him think there is the possibility he

could earn a white hat, and then you use him to control, and divide the rest of the work force.

"Corky, you and Walter work here at the cutting station. The rest of you men get yourselves and some of this material down into chimney there."

"God don't he love to give orders all of a sudden," Corky said loud enough for Bass to hear.

Bass ignored him, and the men set to work. The scaffolding was a type of aluminum piping, with bolt clamps on either end. These pipes were crossed and stacked vertically and horizontally to create a central structure of dubious stability. The men would work on planks supported on pipes, like outriggers. It was an idiosyncrasy of union jobs that scaffolding construction fell under the jurisdiction of the carpenters local, even though the only wood was the planking. Only carpenters could set up, adjust, and take down scaffolding.

As soon as he set foot on the structure Seals knew he had a problem with this arrangement. He had made a vow that he would never work off of scaffolding unless he put it up himself. His mind flashed back instantly to the feeling of helplessness he had experienced when two stories of scaffolding had buckled under he and two other men twelve years before. They were all working for Seals's father, who by this time was making it big in Tacoma, and had his head up his butt looking for more money. Someone else had set up

the scaffolding, and Seals never thought to check it. When the structure had gone out from under them everything had gone into slow motion for Seals. He was falling, and then he was on his back sliding down a long plank, around him the wrenching noise and splintering of catastrophe crashing to the ground, the ground which he hit feet first tumbling, trying to roll free of scattering debris.

There was a strange ephemeral moment in which he realized he was alright, and then the moaning of another man. Seals had landed on a long plank as it momentarily caught in the crumbling wreckage, and it had shot him out and away from the disaster. The others were not so lucky. One lay tangled in a pile of wood and metal, moaning, and convulsing. Seals leapt to dig him out tears running down his face, and terror coursing in his blood. Two hours later this man was dead, his pregnant wife clinging to Seals for support in the white echoing sterility of the O.R..

Two things Seals had sworn at that time, always build his own scaffolding, and never to work construction again. He had kept both for twelve years. Until he decided to go to New Zealand he had lived the simple life of a poet, working in book stores, driving the Book Mobile, doing odd jobs, and kayaking Puget Sound. He'd refused to lay brick until now. Seals inspected the handiwork of the union carpenters with growing concern, and disgust. They had been in a hurry. Who could blame them. The carpenters would not have to work

here. The structure had been created, without forethought. Piping ran every which way, with no concern for structural strength. Even the planking, on which they were supposed to work, was uneven, running on a steep incline in places, creating and unsafe work platform. Seals immediately climbed out of the hole.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm not working on that scaffolding the way it is."

"Get back down there and get to work." Bass puffed himself up.

"It's not safe. Look at it."

"He's right." It was the new man, Rose. "I've never seen such a fucked up job. We're bricklayers man. We don't have to work on this shit."

"I'd rather build my own. Then I know it's safe." As Seals spoke Pat stopped packing material, and stood behind him. "Listen, just get me a socket set, and I can fix it."

"He can't do that," Rose said, "It's the union. The goddam carpenters is the only ones can touch it."

Bass became angry. "You guys just get to work. There's nothing we can do. We just have to work with it. We ain't carpenters."

"Well get us some carpenters. We aren't working until it's safe," Seals said.

"I can't."

"Then get old Tucker up here. He's the union rep. He's supposed to take care of us."

Seals, excited, called Jack and Davie out of the shaft. "It's not safe. We won't work."

"We'll see about that," Bass blustered.

"Pull up a bucket boys. Looks like we got some time to kill." Rose was casual.

"We'll just see. Just see." Furious Bass fled.

The men relaxed. "If you ask me this whole deals screwy. This ain't like no brick laying I ever seen before," Rose muttered, "I thought this was a real job. That's why I come up here from Seattle. I don't know about this refractory shit." He settled back against the cold steel to wait.

FIVE

They didn't have to wait long. Bass was back in five minutes with old Tucker. "Look boys," old Tucker said breathing hard, "The union done the best they could just to get this job so you could work. They had to do some dealing ..."

"Eighty percent scale ain't much of a deal," Davie snipped.

"No it ain't. And I agree but, things aren't like they used to be."

Tucker wasn't sixty yet, but he was pale as death. White, his face with purple veins. Pink around the eye. Albino? Pinkeye. And he shook a little. Twitched. Seals remembered Tucker and Joe Ingress were disgusted by his respirator. They never used em. Never would. Barely wore dust masks.

Tucker spit, and his voice rattled on, "More jobs going nonunion. The union's hard pressed to keep you men working."

"So we should risk our lives?"

"Well, no. But I don't see ..."

Just then Coolie came banging up the metal stairs and into the chimney. Coolie was upset. He couldn't afford to have men sitting around, but he inspected the scaffolding himself.

"Well. That is piss poor." He thought only an instant. "Ok. You men sit tight. I'll have some carpenters here on

the Q. T.. Come on Bass." They hurried out, Old Tucker shuffling behind.

Rose spit. "Now that's more like it."

The men relaxed, waiting for the carpenters to reset the scaffold.

"We don't even have a local in Bellingham anymore. Moved it down to Seattle six years ago." Seals adjusted his safety glasses. "Not enough work up here. Now when there is work here, like the new mall, you guys out of Seattle get hired first."

"Well you guys are sure begging on this one." Rose twisted his moustache. "There ain't even anything to do with bricklaying here. I don't see how you can stand it."

Hell there's guys from Idaho on this job," Davie squinted. "Old Bass there's from Yakima. Polly too. Boys is hungry everywhere, to come this way to do this work."

"I haven't been home in nine months. Got two little girls. I miss em, but I'm going down to that Big job at Fort Lewis next ... no fucking work in Yakima ..." Polly lay back easy.

"Ain't no work anywhere. The goddam union sold it all." Davie's tone was bitter. "Here we are working away from home at eighty percent scale, fuck me man."

Lew spiraled mechanically, lost in the awkward motion of his task. One thing he liked about this job was that it left

his mind free. He could work and dream. He dreamed he was riding out with Spieden and Jimmie, riding out on God's flank across the rolling land. When he got home he'd make sure they went. Spend a few days together in the mountains. These two men Lew loved. Spieden because when Lew's mother dropped him at the farm the old man never had to think about taking him in. He and Virginia had just opened their lives to make a little room for a small boy. Easy. And Jimmie and Lew had been friends almost from the same time.

Jimmie had a way out of any jam. Usually he'd just sleep through it. "That's the way it goes honkey," he'd say , and pull his hat over his soft dark eyes. But that first morning it was just balls. Lew entered fourth grade at Genesee School shortly after his mom dropped him off for good at Spieden and Virginia's. On the third day Lew got in a good scrap with Vernon Howard, right in the middle of class. Vernon kept turning around and shooting Lew the bird. Vernon sat three desks up, in front of Candy Crumb. Lew got up and busted Vernon in the head as he sniggered across to Ricky Winters. All hell broke lose then, and Mrs. Pickalick had to drag Lew kicking and screaming into the hall. Lew, being the new kid was sent to the principles office.

At the same time, just down the hall Jimmie Littlefoot worked patiently in clay, happily sculpting aliens for Opal Thorpe's art class.

"Very interesting Jimmie. Are these your tribe's totems?"

"No."

"O. Well, what are they?"

"I don't know. I just see them."

"I'm sure you do. The creative mind is a wonderful thing."

"At night."

"O."

Miss Thorpe patted Jimmie on the head and awkwardly backed away, moving to check the other student's work. Jimmie went back to work. The figure he was sculpting was tall, thin, delicate in grey with large ovoid eyes that dominated the large head. The whole class worked intently on everything from ash trays to Jimmie's aliens.

"Ohhhhhahhhhhnnnnnnnnnnna!"

From the back of the room Miss thorpe let out a cry and sank to the floor. Everyone turned, and seeing her sag the class ran to her aid. They found her bent over, her back heaving with the effort of her breath.

"She's had a heart attack," Sara Hunter cried.

But no, instead Miss Thorpe fumbled with the small pieces of the turtle family. There were four turtles, small turtles, each one smaller than the next. The turtle family, crudely sculpted by Mary Kay Watsit, lay with broken limbs and tails, scattered across the darkly varnished floor boards. Miss Thorpe struggled artlessly to pick up the pieces.

"O. Is that all?" Jimmie blurted out, turning back towards his desk.

With a shriek Opal Thorpe rose and came at him, crying, inarticulate in her rage. Terrified Jimmie ran, and she chased him around the room, twice. On the second tour Jimmie found the door and fled out into the hall. Opal followed her rage rising to spittle on her lips.

"You're an evil boy. Run, run, run and don't ever set foot in my class again."

Jimmie fled to the office scared, angry and laughing. Now that he'd escaped, the laughter just rolled out of him. He'd never seen anything so ridiculous as that skinny white woman chasing him around. He reported to the secretary that Miss Thorpe was having a heart attack, and all hell broke loose. When it was over Jimmie and Lew were in Mr. Forster's principles office with a three week probation. Lew tried to explain that it was the other boy who started the fight, and Jimmie insisted that Miss Thorpe was insane. The principle did not want to hear it, especially since the Howard boy had gotten the worst of it, and Miss Thorpe was still a basket case. Besides Jimmie was an Indian and certain trouble and Lew was new to Mr. Forster and his style.

Outside the principles office, where he and Jimmie waited for punishment, Lew tried to be friendly.

"You gave your teacher a heart attack?"

"Fuck you."

Lew was shocked. This fucking Indian was trying to stare him down. "You ain't seen trouble yet Navaho."

"I am Nez Perce."

"Big f-en deal. Either way spells looser."

That was that. Jimmie and Lew squared off right there in the school office and went at it. The contest was never decided, though Lew is certain, well almost certain he could have taken Jimmie anytime. The upshot was both of them were dragged back into the office for another two week suspension from school.

As they sat there sullen, staring angrily at each other a warm September breeze blew in the open window. Jimmie looked out the window at the curving blue of the sky, and then at Lew. Lew followed Jimmie's gaze out the window. A small cloud scuttled by. They looked at each other. Without a word they were both up and clambering over the sill. Lew went first. It was an easy five foot drop from the window to the dirt below. Jimmie was right behind him and together they ran across the narrow grass strip to the sidewalk, across the street, over a fence, behind a house, down an alley, and they were gone. They ran Walnut street, past Kennler supply and headed out towards Spieden's place on Fix ridge.

They were in for a long walk, but Indian Summer held the Palouse in colorful clarity, and both boys were happy to be out of school. Their freedom was short lived, but they made the most of it, exploring ditches, and stopping by the arena

where the Genesee Rim Riders practiced. They both loved horses and, by the time the deputy caught sight of them, a friendship was born that would last a lifetime.

"Hey you boys. Stop."

The deputies voice startled Jimmie and Lew out of a reverie over the mud at the edge of a small stock pond, and they ran. They ran as fast as they could, and the deputy chased them. Across the stubble of the field they fled. Jimmie was faster than Lew and ran just in front, his long dark hair streaming behind him like the wings of a black bird. Lew pressed hard to keep up. When the irrigation canal loomed close in front, Lew slid to a stop, but Jimmie never hesitated, and with a fierce howl he leapt the flowing water with ease. Lew stood amazed, and then quickly tried to back track and get a running start at the jump. He was too late, a large hand grasped him by the collar, and dragged him down.

As it turned out Jimmie's father knew Lew's grandfather. In fact Spieden had helped Gilbert with many a horse deal, and Gilbert's father's father had been helped by Spieden's father. In fact Spieden was a direct descendant of William Craig the first white to stake a claim in Idaho. Craig was a mountain man, and interpreter, who proved to be a great friend to the Nez Perce. For generations his family had held close relations with the tribe. Both Spieden, and Gilbert Littlefoot were horse traders, and only marginal farmers.

The majority of the Palouse, and even the greater part of the reservation was wheat farms. The government had encouraged the natives to live in small isolated communities on their own reserve, and then opened up the rest of the land to white settlement.

Gilbert was philosophical about the situation. "Would you want to be a farmer?"

"No. Can't say as I would," Spieden responded.

Spieden farmed a few hundred acres, but preferred "horsing around," as he put it. When the two men had come to pick up the boys from school, they greeted each other warmly.

"Well Gilbert seems the boy's got his father's blood," Spieden chuckled and lightly laid his hand on Gilbert's shoulder.

"Yeah. Seems you have a wild one too now. At least I'm young enough to keep up."

"You got a point there, but hell I ain't that old, and experience is on my side."

"Your going to need it, I think."

And it was true. Lew grew wild, and Jimmie too. Seems they were always together, and always fighting somebody somewhere about something. Usually it was either because Jimmie was an Indian, or because Dean was white. Jimmie and Lew didn't particularly care who they fought, they always

stuck together, and Spieden and Gilbert always came and got them, took them home, loved them like sons.

With a great deal of huffing and puffing two carpenters climbed into the chimney. The brickie's watched as the two men, encumbered with tool belts, and a box jingled and jangled around each other. The little one spoke to them, "You know, they ought to make me King of Iraq." He waited for a reaction, but none came. "Cause I'm so-dam insane. Get it? Sad-dam-Hussien." He laughed by himself. Then he and his partner climbed down into the pit. Fifteen minutes later they climbed back out and headed for the door.

"Where are you going?" Bass asked them.

"Break time."

"That's right." Seals laughed. "We'd better take a break."

"You guys haven't done anything yet."

"Hey, rules are rules. A break is a break." Davie grinned.

"Break time boys."

The men filed out the door. Leaving Bass to fume, before he followed.

A blue, comet like, shower of sparks fell from the darkness above and was sifted by grating just beyond Lumpy's feet. Scattered by the catwalk the sparks cooled, went out,

and disappeared before they hit concrete far below. The peculiar smell of metal and flux swirled round to mix with the odor of Lumpy's own large sweating body, dirty gasses, and the deafening roar of construction. Lumpy's flaccid features registered only absence as he sat on a bucket just outside the mouth of the four foot wide pipe and waited. He could hear Lew working close to the mouth of the pipe. Almost done. In Lumpy's mind universes still collided. Deeper down, warm at his core, he could feel the touch of his mothers hands gently pulling at him there as she stroked him to sleep.

Every now and then he cocked his ear toward the pipe that snaked up from deep in the maze of steel that would soon be the world's largest coke calciner. He liked the sound of that "World's Largest", and he liked this job. It suited him well. He was anxious about what his new task might be, and what.

Just beyond his view three men came along the catwalk around the furnace. Their boots sent vibrations he could feel in the soles of his feet. Lumpy heard a familiar voice and instinctively cowered trying to diminish his bulk.

Pat Ingress came around the corner first. A small crooked smile hesitated around his full lips. His watery blue eyes were red behind safety glasses. Pat pulled out his ear plugs and brushed instinctively brushed off his coveralls, winching as he took a breath between his teeth. Pulling the

glove from his right hand Pat reached up under his safety glasses to rub his eye. Shaw Rose was right behind Pat, and Polly's voice preceded them all as he leaned over Rose's shoulder making sure that Pat didn't miss a word.

"So there I was fucking her in the ass and she turns around and says, pew that stinks." Polly laughed loudly, held his nose and slapped Rose on the back. "Goddam stinky old asshole," Polly chortled.

Shaw looked at Polly as if Polly were stark raving mad. Polly caught sight of Lumpy sitting on his bucket. "Speaking of which, here is my favorite asshole." He sniffed the air and slapped Lumpy on the side of the head knocking his hard hat over to one side. "Goddamit Lumpy. Get your thumb out of your ass and tell Lew it's break time."

Lumpy looked up at Polly without raising his head. Polly's kinky red hair stuck out thickly beneath his hard hat. He took the paper dust mask that hung around his neck, fixed it on the brim of the hat and ran his hand through his sparse red beard. "Goddam worthless apprentice", he muttered. Slipping his hands into his pockets he ambled off easy in his six foot frame, his arms hanging relaxed from sloping shoulders. Pat and Rose followed Polly, and looking like the long and short end of some disastrous circus they disappeared down the metal stairway.

Seals watched them go as he and the other men came down

from the chimney. Stopping at the pipe, Seals called, "Break Lew."

Seals's voice echoed on down the pipe and was joined by a wad of Copenhagen Lew threw after it. Lumpy waddled off after the others, so Seals waited a moment till Lew emerged from the pipe. Seals was surprised to find Lew close to the mouth of the pipe.

"Shit you've got her done."

Lew set himself down lightly on the grating, and brushed himself off.

Seals moved back trying not to breath the dust. "You should wear a respirator. At least a dust mask."

"Fuck it man. It's too hot in there". Lew, his lips pink on his pale face, grinned exposing yellow teeth, spat and said, "Besides, she's done."

Most of the men made the long climb down to the brickie's trailer for break, so they could smoke, but Seal's and Lew crossed over through a maze of metal from the world's largest coke calciner, which was under construction, to the world's second largest coke calciner, which was in production. Seals wanted to see what it was they were building, and there it was, intense, fired up and burning like madness.

Pale fire swept everything, rushing white hot from giant ports as the floor slowly rotated. The surging roar added to the intensity and the walls glowed a white, orange, gold,

blue hell dance. Black coke, spread and stirred by sweeping arms, sparkled red hot, fired to four thousand degrees by gas jets, and slowly rotated with mechanical precision.

"The fires of damnation." Lew spit. "Jesus, that's hot."

"I loath the light of the monotonous stars." Seals had his face pressed to the small observation port, his hands cupped around his eyes.

"What?"

Seals pulled back. "Nothing, a poem."

Lew smiled his in your face grin. "Some kind of poetry from hell."

"Yeah."

"Shit. Let's get some air." Lew spit.

SIX

Lew and Seals retraced their steps, across the catwalk that joined the two buildings, then followed metal pathways, stairs and ladders moving up. Seals turned left along a catwalk to a stairway up through the dim heights of the building. The stairway went up to a patch work of plywood and tarps. Stepping through the tarps Seals and Lew climbed a short way to a landing high up near the roof of the building. The sky had broken open momentarily, the grey fog had lifted, and only the brown smog of Vancouver hung over the Fraser River Valley where it opened broad and flat to the north, below the Canadian Cascades, and here protected from sight by the draping of the tarps they none the less could see for miles.

"I love this country," Seals said dreaming of New Zealand.

Lew did not answer, and Seals decide to fall silent. He did love this country, this wild west coast of Washington with its mountains and islands. And the sun felt good after a long winter. Seals thought of his river, the South Fork of the Nooksack where it tumbled down from the Sisters Peaks. For years Seals had been going to a private little beach there to swim. Even that was coming to an end now.

Lew pulled the two smashed doughnuts from his pocket, unwrapped them and gave Seals one. They ate in silence, surveying all the lands their vision encompassed. Seals had

ceased to be amazed, though still angered by the patchwork of clearcutting that stripped the mountains. From Bellingham to Ashland there was not a hill that had not been ripped. Great huge patches of baldness, like mange oozed across the landscape. Whole mountains were deforested. The great rainforest of the Nevergreen state was gone. The whole fucking state was fucked up and he was part of it.

Seal's knew he was building bombs. Boeing was bombers, and star wars. He could not deny the coke was part of the process, part of the military complex. He took little solace from the fact that the calciner was a recycling machine. The waste from the petroleum distillation was used to smelt aluminum ore. Great. So what? At least he was getting out, and all he needed was a little money to do it.

Seals had read about an artist who blasted paint out of jet engines and called it art. Seals was not so sure he would call it art, but still it would be fine here. Bring a jet in and blast paint all over the refinery. Big splotches and drips of color like a living Pollack. The machine as the soul of man. What he really believed is that someone should paint these gray forms again. The shapes of working men, like Hopper and Pollack, or better Diego Rivera. Maybe not, Rivera was a marxist and Seals believed himself apolitical. More like the WPA painters, The Ashcan School and the NY-8. More down home, Americana. The well muscled torsos of propaganda. Truth to tell, Seals preferred the female form.

Mick, Kedra's ex always said, "Tits and ginners, that's what sells". He thought of Kedra, of leaving her, the girls. And he thought of himself alone, adrift in The Bay of Plenty, nothing between him and the sea but kayak.

Lew sat beside him on a Steel I-Beam that blocked off the open end of the landing where it would eventually lead to the roof. A small breeze ruffled his thick blonde hair.

"I wish I could afford to quit this job."

"You want my honest advice?" Lew didn't respond one way or the other, and Seals went on. "If it was me I'd just go. Life is too short, and this job is shit. There are forces in this world, if you do the right thing, the thing your heart tells you to do, that don't respond to this metallic madness."

Lew looked at him like he was crazy.

"I mean, we are not the ones who provide the things we need."

"You are fucking crazy. Goddam New Age hocus pocus." Lew leaned back and for the first time let himself enjoy the view. "It's pretty here, when the fucking sun shines."

They were silent.

Seals felt the ever present dread. It was time to go back to work, to leave the sweet air and climb back down, down, down into the inferno. He watched Lew's face, etched by a hard life, a struggle and a peace, wild, flowing there. A raven flew down from the darkening sky, spiraling down from

the small patch of blue that squeaked between the clouds, and landed above them. Prauk klok klok. Seals wondered how many people knew the Raven was considered North america's largest song bird. The throaty, melodic klok was a mellow music amid the burst of the refinery.

"You ever wish you could fly?" Seals mused.

Lew rubbed his aching hip. "Hell, I used to think I could."

Lumpy stuck his head in the end of the pipe, and was surprised to see Lew so close. He awkwardly lowered a bucket of Firebond down, and Lew secured it. Jesus Lumpy was a slow bastard. Lew spit a wad of tobacco down the pipe. Reaching back he pulled his Copenhagen from his back pocket, and placed a fresh pinch between his cheek and gum. Hunger. hay'axtsa.

Lew checked his watch, happy to pause in his slow spiral. Forty five minutes to lunch. He wiped the silica dust from his sweating brow. Sweat soaked his t-shirt. His muscles flexed casually beneath the silica that caked his arms. He was almost finished with the pipe. A few more courses and he'd be able to stick his head out. Lew yanked on the rope, yelled up, "Bricks," and waited as Lumpy ponderously lifted the empty bucket. It banged and echoed against the side of the pipe.

Up in the chimney, Seals worked side by side with Polly and Pat Ingress gluing insulation board on the walls of the chimney. This work was awkward, dirty, and had no flow to it. The scaffolding rising up like a tower through the center of the flue made the work space close. Nothing like laying bricks, and Seals was frustrated. Beside him, Pat struggled with a three foot sheet of fiber board. Seals helped him. The mood was tight. Scaffold rose up from the reinforced plywood that blocked off the bottom of the chimney at the ceiling of the furnace, and cluttered the space with its skeleton. The noise of the men ramming down below was nearly deafening, but the worst was the air. The vertical part of the chimney was about forty feet. The men were working at the very bottom, and cutting the fiber board created a large amount of silica dust. There was no ventilation, not even an open port for air to get in. The light of the arc lamps, diminished by the blizzard of shards and dust, cast a surreal pall over the work space. The shaft was like some dim scene from an underwater movie, and Seals was glad he had his respirator, but even at that it was hard to breath. Except for Seals, the other men wore only paper dust masks.

Seals felt like a fool. He had been in unsafe working situations before, at the mercy of the man, the bosses. His father had introduced him to construction when he was fourteen, and it was not until the scaffold accident that

they had a parting of the ways. It was his father's companies fault, but his father denied all responsibility. The men had built the scaffold themselves. Each man had a responsibility for his own safety. It was true, and that was why Seals felt like a fool. He knew better than to be in this position, but here he was. He had not spoken to his father for five years after the accident, and he had set out from Tacoma on a journey that led him to Mexico, Alaska, and Hawaii, to Kedra, her daughters whom he loved more than he could explain. More than he loved Kedra really. If she just left, he and the girls would have survived just fine. They were not even his daughters, but without them he didn't think he could survive. There was an unconditional aspect of his love for Mattie and Maxine. He knew he would always love them, no matter what.

Not like his own father, who had disowned him. Seals could not comprehend how a father could do such a thing. He understood that his father was acting defensively. Protecting himself from the reality that money was more important to him than his own son. Seals had to be worthless, because to Leitrim he was. Nothing mattered except his rise to power and riches. Seals's mother loved them both and was caught in a catch. Anyway it didn't matter. That was the past. Leitrim was dead. Right now the urge to run was pounding in Seals's heart. He had enough

money for air fare, but if he could hold on he could live free for a year, just travel and write.

That was really what got Lietrim. His son wanted to be an poet. "A poet for christsakes. Might as well shoot himself in the head right now, save the world some trouble." His father thought laying brick was art. Bringing his company from small time residential to big time commercial projects was his master stroke. Lietrim had just made his first million, and by god Seals couldn't do any better. Seals had watched how the pursuit of money changed his father. Hell for all intents and purposes Lietrim had disappeared from Seals's life when Seals was eleven. Too busy to play ball, or come to any of his son's swim meets, Lietrim was making money and he believed giving it in large amounts was good love.

Well, it didn't work, and Seals had sworn that he would not let the same thing happen with Kedra's daughters. He thought of them as he had first seen them, small, sleepy in flannel PJ's. He was going to be there for them, not let the suck of the dollar pull him away from the only thing he loved. Their genuine need for a father. Seals wished he was hanging with the girls now. These were the first days of summer for them, and he was not there, with them walking on the beach, playing in the park, going to the movies. His absence made him angry, because it had nothing to do with anything, except that Kedra had not loved him, could not

probably, and he was here, planning to leave for good, in the bowels of the beast toiling for the devil.

Lew stuck his head out of the pipe and gave a little howl. "Dam near got her, Lump."

Lumpy jumped, his anxiety peaking.

Lew Ducked back down. He'd have to bust ass to have the dam pipe laid by lunch, but he was close, dam close. He'd been thinking about his son, Spider. Just musing what it might be like to be a father to him, to share ??? a trip up in the mountains.

He wondered what the kid was doing right now. Probably still asleep.

But, "Spider" Day/Harrison was walking the streets of Rapid City, South Dakota. He'd left the trailer early. Myron and Libby were on one of their binders, and Spider and Myron had fought again. Shit he was going to kick Myron's ass some day. It was true that he'd been kicked out of school again. Friday morning Spider had dressed quickly, and made the school bus. But in first period he had been kicked out. "For nothing." Shit he didn't even do anything. Bobby Burns had made a joke about condoms, and spider had laughed. But Mrs. Hugnut had jumped on him, and dragged him out in the hall, calling him "Mr. Smart Stuff." Spider told her to, "Go fuck herself." And that had been that.

Fuck, the last week of school too. He'd really fucked up again. Now he walked quickly through the cool Sunday morning, turned the corner, and hammered on the door of a small dojo. When the door was opened, Spider stepped inside and bowed to his Sensi. Without a word, Spider changed, and came out tying his brown belt around his waist. His Sensi, Mr. Si, was a small stout Korean with thin grey hair. His dark eyes sought an answer. Spider ignored him and began attacking a bag. The sensi stopped his hand.

"Trouble at home?"

"Yeah."

"You want to talk."

"No."

"At least do it right. Take the time to breathe."

"Fuck you." Spider attacked the bag again. The Sensi went to the equipment locker, and returned to drop a full set of pads at Spider's feet.

Spider stopped, looking from the equipment on the floor to the black impassive eyes of his Sensi. He had watched Mr. Si spar, and knew that despite the fact that he had only one arm he was deadly. But it was that one arm that gave Spider courage. Surely he could hold his own. He picked up the pads, and put them on. In the middle of the dojo Mr. Si bowed to him. Spider returned the bow and then attacked. He was amazed at how swiftly the old man moved, and then at the

force of his blows. Shit this was full contact, and in a moment he was fighting for his life.

Their bodies came together with a surging hail of kicks, and blows. Mr. Si, catching more air than Jordan, drove his heel into the side of Spider's head, and then forced three solid blows into his chest. Spider remembered to block, and soon was concentrating on defense, trying to survive.

When it was over he sat on the matt, blood running out of his nose, the side of his face bruised, and a deep aching in his chest. The Sensi bowed, then placed a padded hand on his shoulder.

"Feel better?"

"Yes."

"Good. Clean up. I will show you offense."

Up in the chimney, Rose refused to work. "Hell this refractory shit ain't fit work for a journeyman bricklayer," he cursed, and climbed out of the pit.

Once again Bass fled in search of a higher authority.

Rose spit. "Shit you guys ain't got no self respect. I come up her thinking this was a real job. Shit man I don't have to do this crap."

The men stopped working momentarily. Polly only shrugged. They all knew walking away was easier for Rose, he was from Seattle. He had the union behind him, and besides he could get other work. Eighty miles away and you had to take what

came. "There isn't any brick work up here," Little Davie was plaintive.

"Fuck me then, I'd move,"

"Yeah."

Coolie came up, and he and Rose discussed the problem. Seals and the others slowly went to work. Collie nodded, and Rose gathered his tools, and followed him out.

"Shit, I should refuse to work too," Seals said. "Seems that's all it takes to get what you want around here."

"That's what it takes for Rose to get what he wants. You ain't getting shit, neither is the rest of us," Little Davie was pissed.

"Calm down boys. Let's just do the work. Think about pussy. That'll take your mind off it." Polly went back to work.

"Pat you get back to work." Bass peered down on them.

"Put your dick in it boys," Polly chimed.

"Your fucking dick'd rot off in this place, if you had one," Davie shot Polly a hard look, and the men fell into the awkward rhythm of the work, and the camaraderie of misery.

Seals struggled with himself in the foul air of the chimney. The silica whirled like a blizzard. The glass dust settled thickly on the men, and when they moved it rose up. In the cruel light of the arc lamps each movement was haloed. Heavenly, but it was hot as hell.

"This has got to be illegal. We need ventilation." Davie worked beside Seals. He whispered, "Somebody should call WISHA."

"So call them."

"Maybe I will."

"Why don't we just take it up with Tucker. He's shop steward. He's supposed to take care of this shit."

"Fuck. He's worthless. He's in Becthl's pocket anyway."

"Well let's talk to him."

"Ok, something has to be done. No bullshit. They can't get away with this."

"Lets go."

"Ok."

"Right now."

"Yeah, ok." Little Davie looked around for support, but the rest of the men were hard at work.

"Come on." Seals climbed out of the chimney. Little Davie followed.

"What the hell is going on now!" Bass was about fed up.

"We wan to talk to Old Tucker."

"Well you can't, get back to work."

"Fuck you."

Seals brushed past Bass, and Little Davie followed giving Bass a wide berth.

SEVEN

Old Tucker was sitting in the furnace catching his breath, with Joe Ingress Pat's father. Tucker looked up feebly when the two men approached.

"What do you boys want?"

Seals looked at Davie, who had stopped just behind him, then spoke. "We need some ventilation up in the chimney."

"Ahh quit your whining you candy assed ..." Joe Ingress's voice trailed off in disgust, as old Tucker waved him off.

"Now boys, there ain't a lot I can do, but if you got a complaint, I'll look into it. Now get back to work."

Seals stepped closer. "We just want you to do your job. You're shop steward. You are supposed to hear our grievances, and see that we are treated fairly."

"Well I told you I would."

"If you don't, I'm calling the union on you old man."

"I know you." Old Tucker stood. "I know your kind," Old Tucker's face shook. "It ain't enough you got a good goddam job. You want somebody to baby sit you. Well your asshole's got to come out as far as mine in the morning."

"What?"

Joe Ingress stood up beside Tucker. "Why you pukes. If you had a reasonable grievance ..."

Davie reached around Seals, and poked Tucker in the chest. Seals put his arm out, holding the lunging Davie back. "You're Coolie's lackey. A company goon. You'd send us

all to our deaths before you'd rock the boat," Davie growled.

Joe grabbed at Davie, and Seals found himself between the two old men. He pushed Joe off.

"Get your hands off me you little commie Trotsky faggot ..."

"Pig."

"I been doing this goddam work for forty years, and I'll be dammed if I'll have some little snot nosed radical agitator wrecking a job I'm on. I'll work you so hard, you'll be shitting bricks tomorrow, and I'll see you fired if you don't get out of my sight right now. Goddam it get him out of my sight!" Old Tucker was livid, his rage spilled out, and his body shook. He turned bright red, and looked like he was going to explode. Unable to contain himself the old man lunged for Seals, but Davie was able to pull Seals back into the crowd that had gathered.

"I'm calling the union."

"You do and it will be the last call you make round here."

The crowd which had parted to let Davie push Seals out of reach, closed back around Old Tucker and Joe. Seals caught a glimpse of Old Tuckers face as he screamed after them, "You'll never work for this union again I promise you that."

Davie hustled Seals out onto the catwalk.

"That went well."

"He's a pig. He's working for the company," Davie consoled him.

"Yeah, but we may not be."

"I don't care. I should quit, but I won't. That would mean they had won. And besides. All these other men. Someone has to fight for their rights. These big companies need to learn that they can't treat workers like this."

"Your right."

Rose clambered out the port hole, and came over.

"Pretty rich boys. Glad to see you stirring it up. I'm out of here."

"You quit?"

"Yeah. Hell I can go back down to Seattle and, in a couple weeks, lay brick on a real job. I just came up here to fill the time. I heard this was a good job, but it ain't."

"Yeah it just seems to get worse." Seals spit over the railing. "I think we should call WISHA."

Rose looked around carefully. "Yeah. Maybe. They're getting away with murder on this job, that's certain."

"I can't do it," Seals said. "They'd know right away it was me." He and Rose looked at Davie.

Davie involuntarily took a small step back. "Don't look at me boys."

"I've got the number here." Davie pulled a slip of paper out of his pocket. "I'll even give you the money." He pulled

a handful of change out of his pocket and tried to hand it to Seals. Seals refused to take it, and Davie put the coins in his other hand. The silver clattered soft in his palm.

"You call at lunch."

Seals looked around, his reluctant hand meeting Davie's "I'm not saying I will."

Seals put the coins in his pocket, looked at the number on the piece of paper, and slipped it inside his coveralls. He knew well enough that if he called he didn't want Davie or Rose to know for sure it was him. He might be being set up, and anyway the call would come back well enough on it's own. It was hard to tell how the men would take it, but one thing was for sure, it would piss somebody off, and he didn't know who to trust.

"Well good luck boys. I'm out of here. Pleasure to have made your acquaintance."

They shook hands all round, and then Rose was gone clanging down the metal staircase into the darkness.

Back up in the chimney the men worked in sullen silence.

"Shit this is an easy job. You guys ought to be happy your not ramming like the guys downstairs," was all Polly said.

And Seals knew it was true. From beneath their feet the men could hear constant rumbling. The scaffold shook with a clatter and bang of thirty pneumatic jack hammers. The men

below were working on the ceiling of the furnace. Because of the intense heat rising, these surfaces had to be covered with "Ram Plastic" too. The soft refractory material was being sliced, and rammed into moveable forms suspended from the ceiling. It was hard brutal work. Each man ran a ram gun eight hours a day. Under the pressure and vibration men's bodies became pliable, and melded to the machine. It was only later, in the silence that the pain flowed from their hands.

Seals would get his share of ramming by the time the project was complete. It didn't matter, he was New Zealand bound. Still the whole process was brutal, and there was little or no excuse for making men work in a toxic atmosphere without proper ventilation. He had made up his mind to call WISHA. Davie was right. Bechtel Corporation would push a man as far as a man would allow himself to be pushed. The men were expendable. There were always more, eager to work. Hungry in America. He would have to be careful. Casual. Just walk down to the phones at lunch like he was calling home. He looked over his shoulder. The other men worked in silence, and he turned back to his task, his mind swirling with a mixture of anger, pride and shame.

The sporadic blue flare of the welders cast a death pall on Lumpy's lard like complexion as he slept sitting on his bucket. From childhood he had learned to feign incompetence

as a means of avoiding work. Over the years he practiced it to an art so that now even bucket time ranged beyond the scope of his ability. He was unaware of the shadow that fell across his form as Polly, Bass, Seals, Pat, Joe and Seals gathered around him.

"The apprentice at work", Bass sighed.

Polly kicked the bucket out from under Lumpy. Lumpy landed hard on the metal grating his eyes bulging and his mouth opening to emit a small squeal. "Goddamit Lumpy. You're sitting out here so you can help Lew in case of an emergency. And you're fucking asleep."

Wary of further abuse Lumpy struggled to get up. He was bent over when Polly grabbed him by the back pockets and started to hump his butt. Polly laughed and looked back at his companions for approval. He was encouraged by hoots of laughter. On the verge of tears Lumpy cried out and Polly let him go kicking his hard hat after him. "Fucking cunt", Polly spat. Lumpy hurried down the metal stairs followed by a flood of derisive laughter.

Bass stopped laughing and stuck his head in the pipe. He jumped back. "Shit."

Lew popped up grinning. "Bout got her."

"No shit." The last was said more to the men on the catwalk than to Lew.

Polly gave a warhoop. "Hot Dam!", he cried. "Lets's eat!" Hooking his leg over the metal banister he slid down the

first flight of steps lighting with a metallic shudder on the landing below.

"Be careful. Don't let Coolie see you fucking around."
Bass followed cautiously.

"O fuck Bass, loosen up."

Seals, found himself alone with Lew as the others disappeared into the depths below.

"Lower life forms." Seals thrust his chin in the air. "I don't know who is more disgusting. Lumpy or Polly."

"You laughed."

Seals shot a hard hurt look at Lew. "I didn't want to."

They went down together into the rain. Which had stared falling in earnest again. In the stream of bodies, that now moved along the catwalk they were carried down the metal stairways and out a door into a blare of sunlight. Lew, blinded by the light covered his eyes. He tried to stretch out his left leg. The hip was cramping from being bent all morning in the pipe, and his leg hurt. The stream of workers had become a river as Lew and Seals were joined by the flood of men and women, from other parts of the project as each of the trades headed back to their own trailers.

Lew hacked and spit trying to draw a clean breath. He rubbed his painful hip, and he and Seals allowed themselves to be carried on towards lunch. Lew's hip was hurting again, and he was tired, hung over.

"God, I feel like shit."

"Yeah, who doesn't?"

Lew had been in his pipe all morning, and was unaware of the animosity that held a small clump of men around Old Tucker where he walked a ways ahead. With him was old Joe, Randy, Polly and Corky. Tucker was obviously still steamed, cause he kept looking back towards Seals, and Lew who walked just behind.

"I saw Kedra again last night."

"Well, that's good. Right?" Lew knew Seals's had moved out on Kedra and the girls. She'd dumped him, basically, but still fucked him. Lew had little sympathy. He hadn't been laid in over a month. God what it would feel like ... shit it didn't matter. He'd just fuck it up somehow. His bad luck with women seemed to run true.

"Yeah, I guess. She called, so I went over. I think she's just using me for sex.

"Hey, if that's a problem."

"No. I mean, she just likes sex ... every way. It's great, but"

"Sounds like you ought to marry her," Lew said.

"Marriage is a bourgeois concept."

Lew shook his head. Just like a man. The thing he wants most is the thing he fears most. An easy girl, or an eager girl, and here was Seals standing on principle. And some cockeyed principle at that. Lew laughed thinking about the absence of sex in his own marriage. He'd married a nice

girl, and now he had nothing. He often thought he would have given up everything for girl who liked sex more than money, and here was Seals with one he didn't know what to do with.

At the trailer, Seals and Lew sat with their lunches with the other men surrounded by Polly, Pat Ingress. Bass, little Davie at a table. Lew sat next to Bass, unaware of Bass's new position.

Polly leaned around Bass and punched Lew in the shoulder.

"What's this shit I've been hearing about you wanting to go back to Idaho. We still got a months work right here by god."

Lew didn't pay much attention to him. He was interested in his lunch. "I just want to get back to the Palouse", he managed with his mouth full.

Everybody cried bullshit. "He's missing some pussy, I bet.", Polly said mockingly.

"I just hate being away, period."

Polly pulled out his wallet. "Hell I miss my family." He proudly showed pictures of two lovely blonde girls. "You think I don't Miss them? Christy is six and Tanya is nine."

Polly's daughters were very pretty, and Seals was surprised Polly could be a father. He shuddered at the thought of Polly and young girls. Maybe he was a good dad. Maybe not, he seemed to love his daughters. Seals handed Polly back his wallet. "Those are pretty little girls you've got Polly."

Before he could stop himself, Seals pulled out his own wallet. "Here's pictures of mine."

Polly took Seals's wallet and looked at pictures of two young boys. "Hell I didn't think you were married."

"I'm not."

Polly flipped through more pictures stopping at a picture of a pretty young woman. "Jesus who's this dolly?" He showed Kedra's picture around.

"My girlfriend," Seals answered.

"Shit I'm coming home with you tonight. You're laying up a fox like that, why I'd ..."

Seals cut him short. "Watch it Polly." He reached over and took his wallet back.

"I wasn't going to say nothin." Polly feigned innocence, and then laughed. "Shit that pretty little gal's got you twisted." He laughed again. Though several of the others did too, Seals didn't join in, and Polly let it drop.

"I've got to make a call. I'll catch you guys in the chimney."

Little Davie shot Seals a glance, but the other men did not give Seals departure a second thought. As he moved out of the trailer he caught the bloodshot eyes of Old Tucker. They burned pink.

SYNOPSIS

How the story ends ...

We meet Jimmie Littlefoot as he meets Frankie Joel, and they fall for each other.

Tim Seals calls WISHA to report unsafe working conditions. Old Tucker dies of a heart attack in the lunch room.

Old Spieden shoots the banker Hedge in the leg after Hedge trespasses. Spieden ends up in jail. Virginia and Jimmie get him out.

Young Spider smashes Myron's nose, and flees. Catching a bus from Rapid City he heads for his grandparents farm in Genesee.

Tim Seals and Kedra have a falling out over her ex, Mick, and Tim's plans to go to New Zealand.

There is an explosion at the refinery. Pat Ingress and others are killed. Polly is badly burned. Seals is burned, but is released from care. Lew escapes injury. At the same time Old Spieden dies peacefully under his favorite tree on the farm.

Lew heads home to bury Spieden. He is eager to be back home on the Palouse. When he gets there he finds his son waiting, and is instantly agitated.

Kedra takes Seals back, shocked by the possibility of his death. Seals launches a successful law suit against AMPCO, in which he is joined by Joe Ingress, Polly and others.

Lew Refuses to join Seals in fighting back against the company. He also fights with Spider, screws Frankie, and pisses off Virginia, who has decide she will live on, even without her man.

The law suit is settled out of court. Seals and his partners get a great deal of money, but no confession of wrong doing. He and Kedra decide to go to New Zealand together, and he vows to himself never to let the girls Mattie and Maxie down again.

Jimmie settle into his sculpture work, having gotten a large contract with the National Park Service to do landscapes of ten National Parks. He has no hard feelings towards Lew, but misses Frankie who has gone to South America.

Lew fights with Virginia. Spider listens to their angry words from his room. In the morning when he wakes up his father is gone.